



Index

[Unit 4 Business Communications](#)

[4.1 - Communication](#)

[The Communication Model](#)

[The Purpose of Communication](#)

[The Process of Communication](#)

[Barriers to Good Communication](#)

[12 Barriers to Communication](#)

[The Effects of Good Business Communication](#)

[Benefits of good communication](#)

[The Effects of Bad Business Communication](#)

[Results of bad communication:](#)

[4.2 Communication with stakeholders of a business](#)

[Methods of Communication](#)

[Written Communication](#)

[Electronic Communication](#)

[Email](#)

[Loyalty Cards](#)

[Fax](#)

[Apps](#)

[Web-based Electronic Communication](#)

[Oral Communication](#)

[Face to Face](#)

[Meetings](#)

[Presentations](#)

[Performance Review](#)

[Images](#)

[Logo](#)

[House Style](#)

[Celebrity Endorsement](#)

[Slogans & Straplines](#)

[4.4 Communicating Via the Web](#)

[Information Site](#)

[E-Commerce Site](#)

[Online Presence](#)

[Creating a Website](#)

[Domain Names & Hosting](#)

[Domain Name](#)

[Hosting](#)

[Legislation](#)

[Data Protection Act](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Successful Business Websites](#)

SEO

4.3 Business communication tools

Word Processing Software

Business Presentations

Desktop Publishing (DTP)

Videoconferencing & Teleconferencing

Videoconferencing

Teleconferencing

Email

Organisation Charts

Unit 4 Business Communications

This unit looks at the purpose and process of communication. It then considers how and why businesses communicate with their various stakeholders, the appropriateness of the different methods of business communication and the variety of communication tools.

This unit is externally assessed

A written exam lasting 1 hour 30 minutes

Paper is divided into 3 sections. All sections give a mixture of multiple-choice, short and extended/long answers

Sections B & C are based around a given scenario

Paper marked out of 90

Topic 4.1 - Communication

This topic considers the communication mode, the purpose and process of communication, the barriers to good communication and the effects on businesses of both good and bad communication



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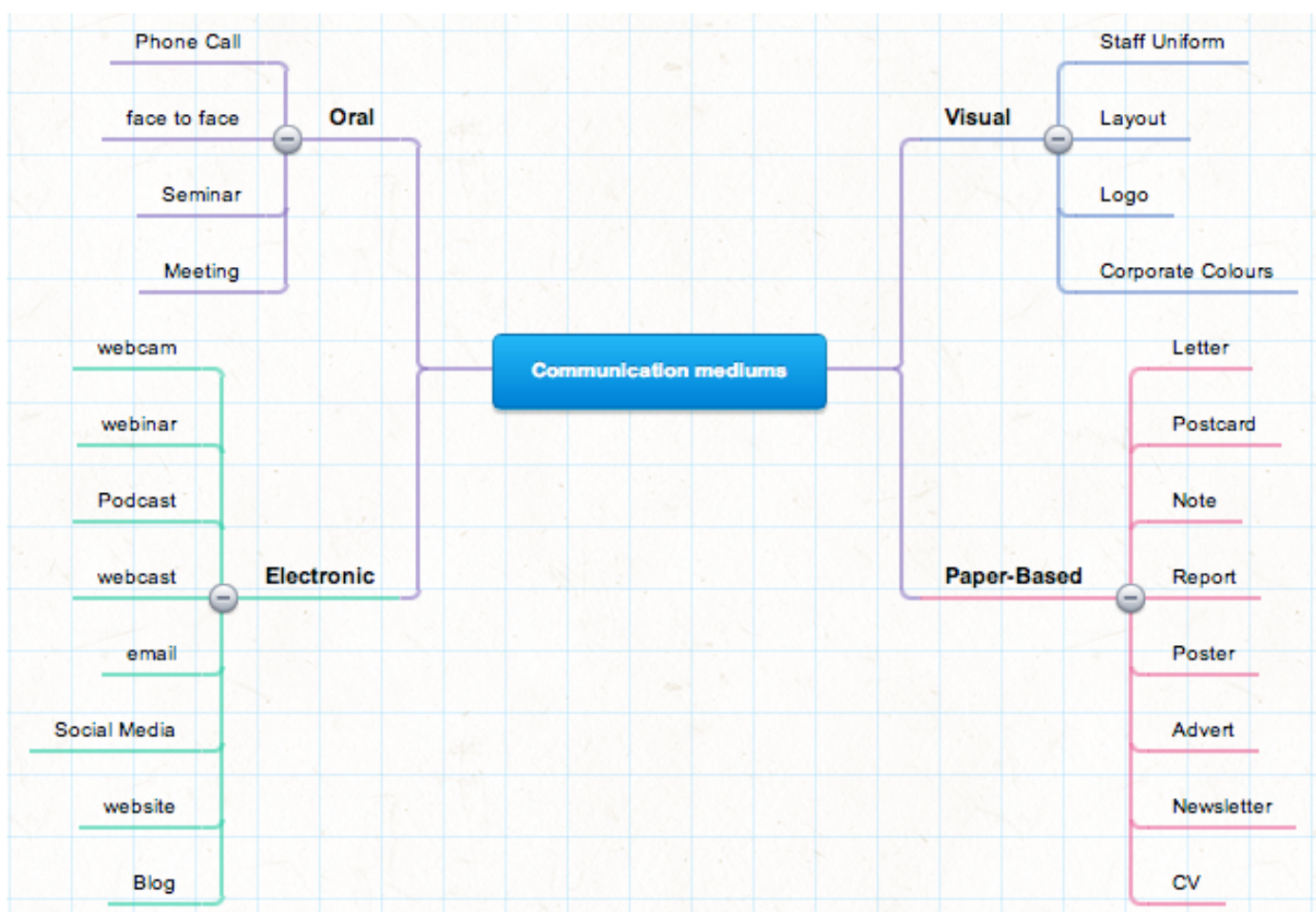
The Communication Model

Communication is the transfer of information between two or more parties.

Communication involves giving information, receiving it and offering feedback as evidence of receipt. A business must communicate effectively to achieve the company goals and be successful.

Feedback is important in communication as it allows the sender to know that their message has been received and understood. It can also let the sender know if there is a problem with their communication method or if the information is not being understood.

Information can be passed on in many formats and using different communication mediums.



Choosing the right method of communication is important to the success of a business. A big part of this is making sure the communication method is appropriate for the intended audience.

The Purpose of Communication

Communication is about the transfer of information.

Communication in business involves messages to and from a variety of audiences. It might be internal or external and it could therefore be formal or informal.

Different audiences will be receiving different information, which might conflict. Each audience that a business communicates will have different requirements and expectations, one method of communication would not fit all. For example letting the staff know that the business is doing well and letting the shareholders know the same thing would involve a different level of formality and totally different details of the success. The shareholders would require fully detailed financial statements but the staff would just want to know the final figures.

Communication can cause conflict when the flow of communication is disrupted or the parties have not given each other feedback previously. Poor communication can lead to information being misunderstood which can lead to conflict.

Businesses must remember that communication with all audiences is of equal importance and should be appropriate for their expectations.

The Process of Communication

The method used by the sender to send out information will affect how the receiver interprets that information.

There are advantages and disadvantages of the different methods of communicating business information. It is important to weigh these up in relation to your audience when choosing a communication medium

Face to face	Meetings, one to one meetings, presentations
Verbal/oral	Through speaking
Electronic	Email, fax, video, phone, TV, Radio, podcast, Internet
Visual	Posters, notices, adverts
Written	Letters, memo's, notes, reports
Sound	Jingles, music, ringtones

Different types of business organisation will use some methods of communication more frequently than others.

Feedback from the receiver tells the sender whether the message has been received, understood and acted upon and is a measure of the success of the communication process

Barriers to Good Communication

Barriers to communication can result in action not being taken, incorrect action being taken, information being ignored, the receiver being unable to act due to lack of skills or the sender simply getting an incorrect response.

The importance of language used, technical content, emotional interference, knowledge of the receiver; use of inappropriate medium, lack of trust/honesty, cultural differences, position/status of the source

12 Barriers to Communication

- Language - not just a foreign language but complex or inappropriate language can be misunderstood
- Technical content - the receiver might not have the technical knowledge to understand the information
- Inadequate Feedback - the sender may receive inadequate feedback due to the message not being received in its entirety, a presentation being misunderstood although the audience is applauding
- Lack of understanding what the receiver wants or needs - If the sender doesn't understand the receiver's wants, needs or expects, the information may not be communicated effectively
- Emotional interference - emotions can get in the way, sending a letter to a customer when you are angry, a customer phoning and being abusive as they are angry
- Degree of knowledge and expertise of the sender & receiver - if there is a difference in these the communication may be misunderstood
- The quality of the information - if a message is confused or poorly written it can be misunderstood
- Use of an inappropriate medium - can lead to the message being misinterpreted or misunderstood
- Lack of trust or honesty in the sender - if the two parties do not trust each other they may not take the message seriously
- Cultural differences - what is acceptable in one culture can be offensive in another
- Poor listening skills - both parties must have good listening skills for communication to be successful
- The position or status of the sender - people sometimes do not take information seriously when it is given by someone of lesser importance to themselves

The Effects of Good Business Communication

There are a number of benefits to good business communication, these cross all stakeholder groups.

Benefits of good communication

- **Increased sales** - may come following a successful marketing campaign, the build up of brand awareness or even as the result of excellent reviews from previous customers
- **Building reputation** - customer loyalty comes with reputation, excellent product knowledge from staff and excellent customer service help with this.
- **Motivation** - improving staff motivation can also come from good training, rewards and a belief in the brand/product
- **Improved efficiency** - well motivated staff could feedback information to help the company meet its goals
- **Improved product information** - the staff product knowledge is important but so is the publicly published information , such as that on the website
- **Achieving objectives** - good communication can achieve objectives by building awareness of the product/brand and making stakeholders feel positively about it

The Effects of Bad Business Communication

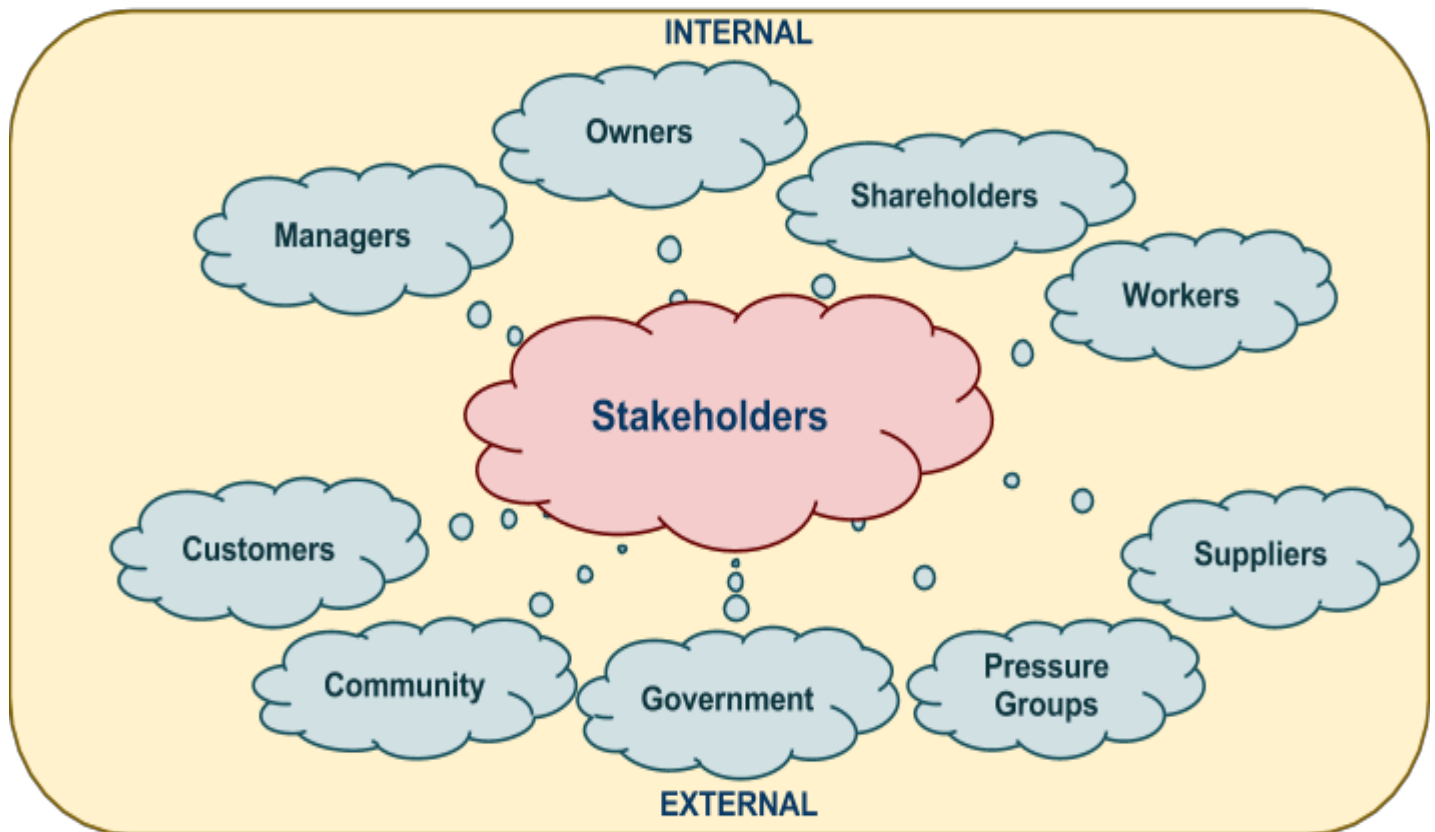
When the receiver is not happy to give feedback problems can arise as communication could be bad.

Results of bad communication:

- **Falling sales** - if the business is not getting the message through to customers accurately.
- **Disruption of supplies** - poor or incorrect communication with suppliers can lead to a breakdown in the supply chain
- **The environment** - if the business is not communicating its commitment to the local and wider environment this can result in bad publicity
- **Effects on the workforce** - staff can become demotivated and look to leave if they feel they are not being kept in the picture regarding the businesses successes/problems
- **Effects on productivity & efficiency** - the demotivated staff may underperform and if staff turnover is high there will need to be a lot of retraining to get new staff to the right level of productivity and efficiency
- **Bad Publicity** - A struggling business will find that bad publicity reduces customer confidence and customers may go elsewhere

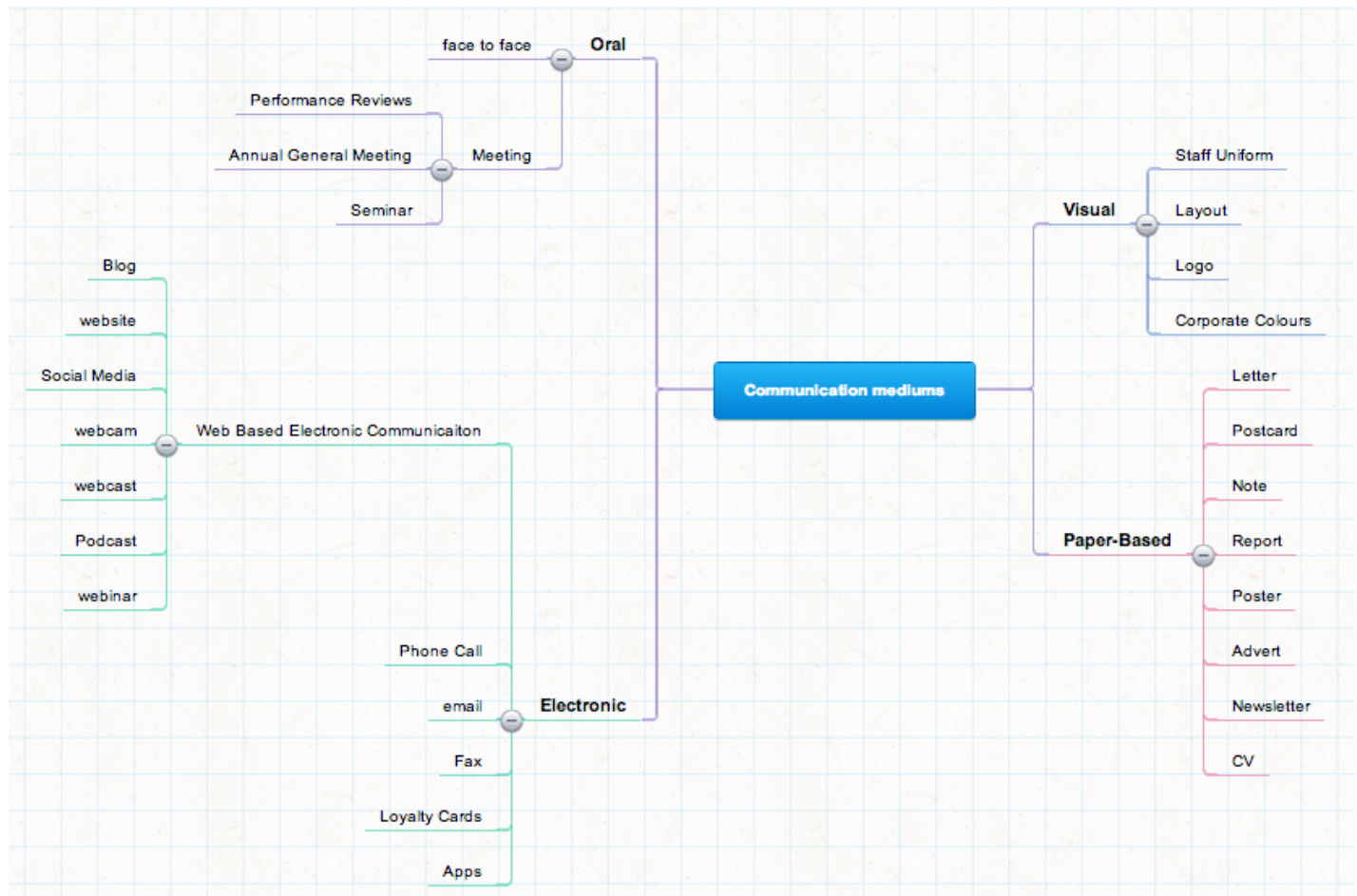
4.2 Communication with stakeholders of a business

Communicating with stakeholders of a business takes different forms depending on the stakeholder. This topic revises the term stakeholder and looks at the different ways business communicate effectively with a range of stakeholders.



Methods of Communication

Communication with stakeholders uses a wide variety of methods. Increasingly communication is via electronic means and there is an ongoing increase in communication through social media.



Written Communication

Although we live in an electronic age we still rely on written communication both online and offline to communicate to stakeholders. This written communication is often formal and can take various forms.

Written Communication

Type	Internal External	Formal Informal	Used For	Effectiveness	Alternatives
Letter	Mostly External	Formal	Writing to customers, shareholders and other external stakeholders	Effective as a record of the dialogue is kept and any misunderstandings can be easily rectified	Email Phone call Face to Face
Report	Both	Formal	A record of something which has been heard, observed or developed	Effective as keeps a record and is used to convey information formally using a variety of methods (often contains charts, appendices etc)	Meeting
CV	External	Formal	A formal presentation of a person's working life giving personal details, qualifications and employment history	Effective as gives a concise overview of a person to employers	Application form
Memo	Internal	Informal	Sending a note or message	Not very effective as relies on being passed/given/posted to all interested parties	Email
Agenda	Internal	Formal	Giving the order of events in a meeting and keeping the meeting focussed	Effective when the person running a meeting follows it	none
Minutes	Internal	Formal	Distributed after a meeting to give a written record of what was discussed	Effective as it gives all parties a record of the discussions	none
Notices	Internal	Informal	Giving information to interested parties, often more personal than business	Effective when stakeholders are regularly checking it	Email
Invoice	External	Formal	A record/bill of sale	Effective as kept for accounts & payment purposes	None
Newsletter	Internal	Informal	Gives news, articles, notices	Effective to keep stakeholders informed	Emails

Electronic Communication

In modern business electronic communication has become the most popular form of communication and is widely used in all business sectors

Email

A quick and easy way for stakeholders to stay in touch with the business but should NOT be used to send important information that needs to be documented with a paper trail. Emails should be concise and to the point. Sometimes they are not received, or not read if the recipient has a busy inbox.

Loyalty Cards

Loyalty cards are issued by retailers and customers are given small rewards for repeat business. The swiping at every checkout means the retailer can gather lots of data on a customer and use this for targeted advertising.

Fax

Largely superseded by the ability to send email attachments. A fax machine scans a document and then sends it to the recipient via the telephone line, the scanned document is printed by the recipients fax machine.

Apps

Like with loyalty cards business gather data from the customers use of their App and the customer is given rewards and special offers. More commonly apps are allowing customers to pay directly using their phone, either by scanning a code or sending payment via PayPal

Web-based Electronic Communication

With so much communication being web based companies are now using it to promote their business by sharing information and interacting with stakeholders. Companies are building connections using social networking tools and targeting advertising through search engines.



Oral Communication

Oral communication can be both formal or informal depending on the method chosen and message to be delivered. For example a department meeting may be largely informal but an AGM would be a formal meeting.

Face to Face

The majority of communication in a business is face to face, staff talk about things relating to work and the business all the time in an informal/unstructured manner. Communication with stakeholders is often face to face too, a customer may enter the business to talk to someone about their needs/requirements.

Meetings

Although a small department meeting may be largely informal it will still follow a set order by starting with an Agenda and following this throughout the meeting. Afterwards minutes will be sent out to all of the attendees so that they have a formal record of discussion. An AGM (Annual General Meeting) is a formal event to which stakeholders are invited to attend to hear about the companies, plans, financial statements and general business reports.

Presentations

Presentations are usually orally communicated to an audience.

Performance Review

A face to face, formal procedure in which an employee's annual performance, goals, targets and general conduct are reviewed. Usually carried out by a line manager this is an opportunity for both the company and the employee to be honest about their work, goals and aspirations.

Images

The power of the image in business communication is a big part of a business brand. Companies have a logo but also a house style, maybe a strapline and sometimes a slogan.

Logo

The main part of a company's image communication is their logo. This will have been carefully designed by professionals and may have changed over the years to reflect the changing face of the company. Images are often designed using specific colours which have meanings associated (think Cadbury's - Purple - Luxury)



House Style

As well as the logo the visual of the house style is important, the fonts and colours used become easily associated with the brand. Even the in house canteen will follow this house style.



Celebrity Endorsement

A further visual to associate with the company is the celebrity endorsement. A hugely successful example of this is Gary Linaker and Walkers Crisps

Slogans & Straplines

The phrase which helps the consumer recognise the brand. *"I'm Lovin' it"*

4.4 Communicating Via the Web

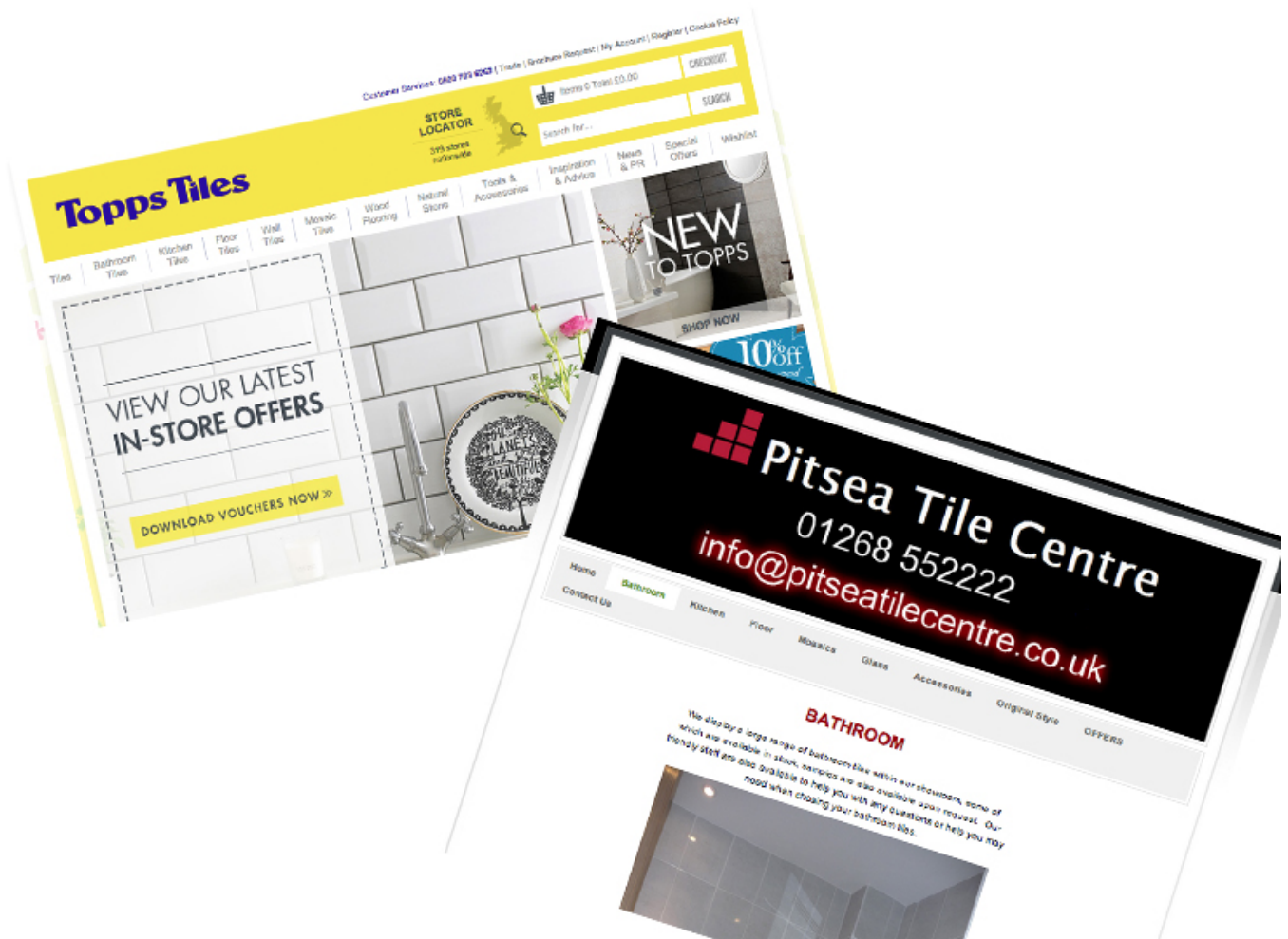
The internet is a global network of connected computers being used to exchange and communicate information, the web is the part of the internet which contains the linked documents. Given that “85% of consumers have used the internet to find a small business online”¹ the web is providing massive opportunities for business to develop communications with their stakeholders.

Information Site

A basic site giving information about the business, its products, services and sometimes prices or guide prices. Suitable for business that provide a product or service that cannot be sold online but that may benefit from being displayed online (hire business such as a bouncy castle company use these).

E-Commerce Site

A site which sells a product directly on its page - usually has a “basket” to put goods in and a checkout option to many payment. Suitable for a business with a product to sell to a wider audience than their physical location.



¹ Kate Russell “Working The Cloud” 2013

Online Presence

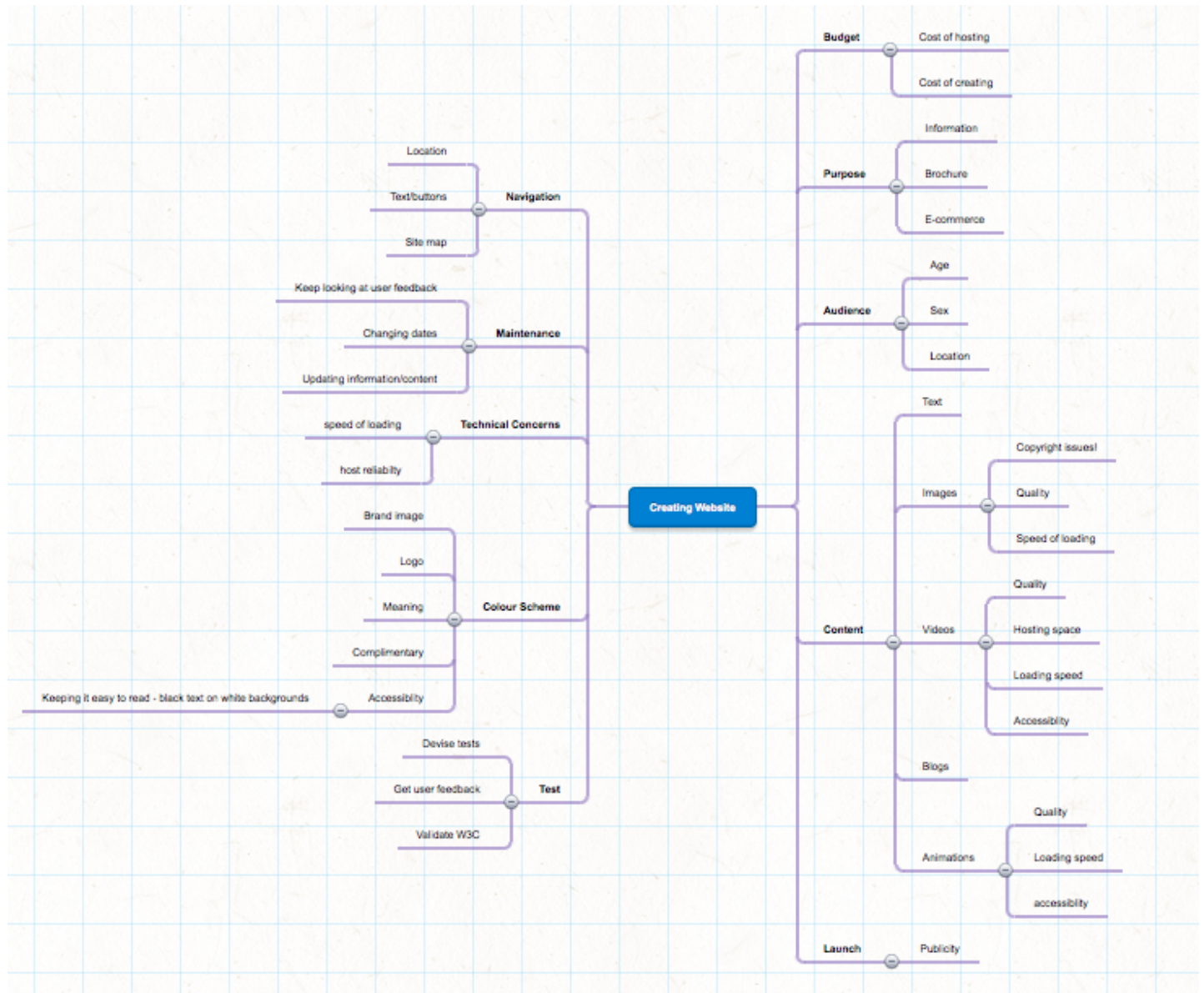
A business will build an online presence with more than just their website. Although their site is the primary presence this may also encompass social media, directory listings and a variety of other online activity such as promoting themselves within specialist forums.

It is important for the business to promote their brand image through their online presence and to make their website have a professional look and feel. As their online presence increases they will also increase customer awareness of their business and if their customers first impression of their business is the website then it should be as professional as their business premises.



Creating a Website

Anyone can create a website either using online tools, web design tools or employing a web designer to make it. There are other considerations when setting up a website.



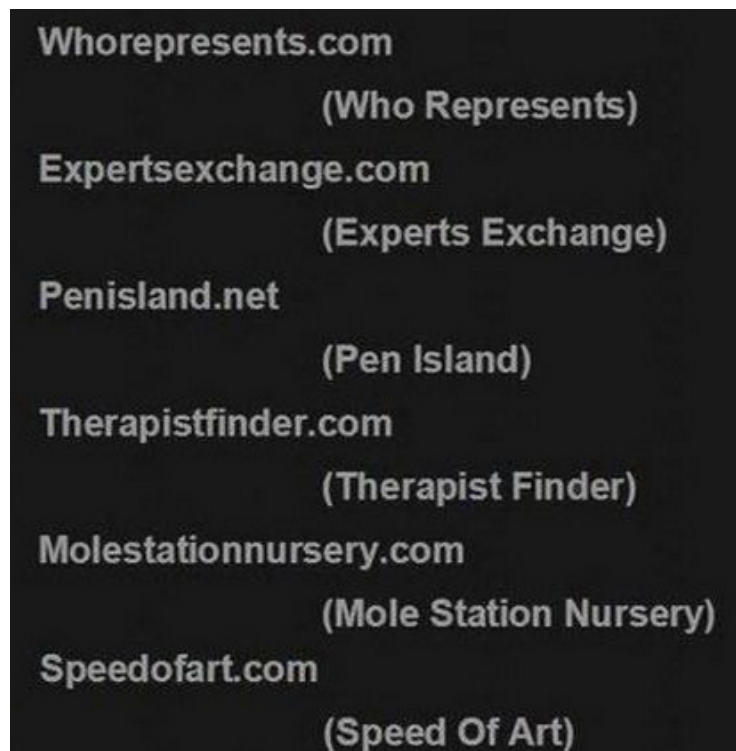
Domain Names & Hosting

Domain Name

It should be memorable, available and easy to type. Unless you are willing to pay a large sum of money you are unlikely to get a single word domain name. You also need to consider the suffix should it be .com, .co.uk or something else?

Domain names should be

- Easy to remember
- Directly related to the business
- Easy to type without errors
- Have the correct extension
 - .com - a US company
 - .co.uk - a UK company
 - .sch - a school
 - .org - an organisation
- Not too similar to other businesses
- Well thought through



Hosting

You need to buy a hosting package for your site - if you get a free one it is likely to come with adverts which you won't want on a business site. You need to find a package that offers the right features for your business - will you need to take payments or run an online checkout? How many email addresses will you need.

Legislation

A website must adhere to certain legislation, failure to do so could leave a small business facing a large court case.

Data Protection Act

Personal information about customers must NOT be posted online.

Copyright

Images and text should be original - using someone else's images is theft of copyright. A business must also make sure they are not selling items for which they do not have a copyright license (for example you can't sell Disney products which you have made unless you have bought a license to make them)

Accessibility

A range of accessibility issues must be considered to adhere to legislation regarding discrimination.

Accessibility Issues

Disability	Issues	Solutions
Colour Blind	Bright colours	Keep colours simple - where text is involved use a white background with black text
	Contrast	Ensure there is a good contrast between colours
Dyslexic	Lots of text	Keep text short and break up into paragraphs
Sight Impaired	Images	Alt text for all images
	Animation	Audio should be self explanatory
	Video	Audio should be self explanatory
Epilepsy	Flashing images	Do not have flashing images as can cause issues for anyone with photosensitive epilepsy
	Tickers	Do not include more than one ticker
Hearing impaired	Video narrative	Ensure any video is self explanatory or has subtitles
Literacy	Text	Use simple everyday language - keep text to a minimum

Successful Business Websites

To be successful a website needs to be efficient, well designed and easy to find.

SEO

SEO is extremely important to businesses if they want to get their websites found by customers. Today most peoples first stop when looking for something is the internet, 20 years ago it was a telephone directory. A business can pay to have its site advertised at the top of a listing for a specific search but in the long run this can be very expensive as the business has to PAY for every click on its listing.

Mrs Evans **Top Tips for SEO**

Content

Make sure your content is rich, include images and videos, text, up to date and compliant with legislation

Keywords

Make sure your text includes the keywords that people will be searching for - but make sure its NATURAL! Use keywords for your alt tags and captions on your images

Blog

Add a blog to your site and keep updating it - remember to use your keywords in the entries!

Register

With all the search engines, with online directories, specialist sites, Google Places (fill in EVERY piece of information you can)

Social Network

Sign up for all of them - update statuses on FB, put relevant links on Twitter, keep related boards on Pinterest. Make sure your Google + site is up to date

Links

Make sure your have good quality backlinks, join trade organisations, groups etc. Remember all those directory entries you spent hours on count as links

Navigation

Add a site map as WELL as your navigation bar, this allows you to index all sub pages and any special pages in a format the search engine spiders LOVE.

4.3 Business communication tools

Business communication tools are commonly found in an “office” suite of software but also include things such as videoconferencing and teleconferencing to aid communication at meetings. Modern business must be adept at using these tools as they have stakeholders who also understand these tools and will soon see if anything has been done incorrectly.

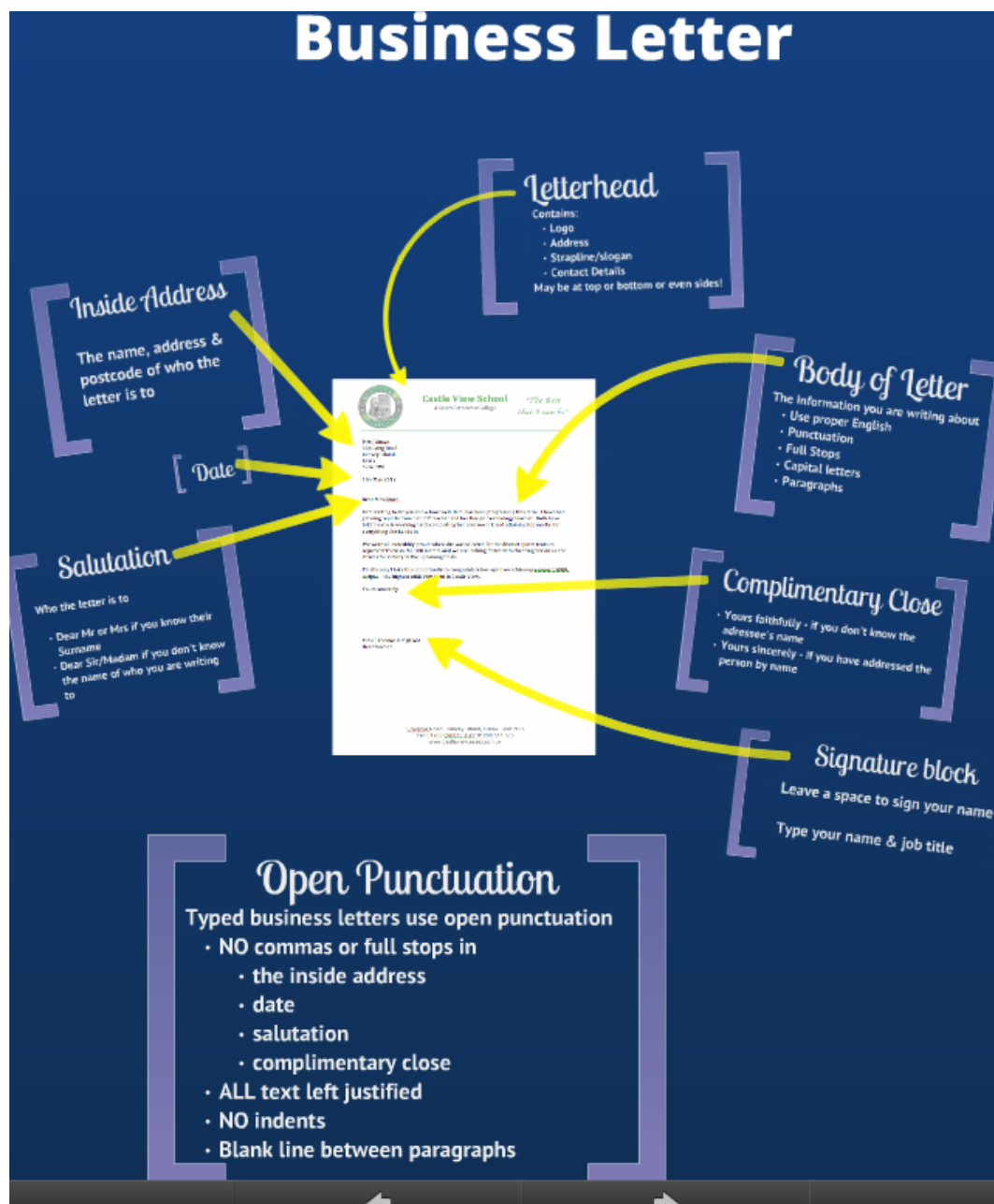
Key Points - Business Documents
Check the spelling & grammar
Avoid long sentences which might make it hard for the reader to understand the message
Avoid slang
Use a consistent layout
Keep to your house style
Be polite
Do not repeat information

Word Processing Software

Word processing is the main tool used in business for communication for the following

- Letters
- Memos
- Reports
- Labels
- Envelopes
- Mail merged letters

Businesses use templates to ensure consistency and professionalism in their documents. Many adopt a house style and specify a font and size to be used in each document. These requirements together with the addition of tools such as spelling and grammar checkers make sure that documents are professional, consistent and of the highest possible standard. Stakeholders are quick to notice any faults or errors.



Business Presentations

Presentations can be given using many tools, such as flipcharts, slides, transparencies, or presentation software. Businesses commonly chose presentation software in conjunction with a projector to deliver a presentation.

There are many advantages to this such as

- Slides prepared in advance
- Handouts can be provided
- Links to documents/websites can be included
- Videos can be embedded
- Images can be included

Things to avoid include

- Keep colours simple
- Plain fonts
- Bullet points rather than paragraphs
- Images should be relevant
- Too many animations

The professionalism of the presenter is important. They should

- Use speakers notes to remind them key points
- Not read from the slides
- Make eye contact with the audience
- Not play “pocket billiards”



Desktop Publishing (DTP)

DTP is the software used to create more visual business documents such as

- Letterheads
- Flyers
- Posters
- Adverts
- Newsletters
- Magazines

DTP software allows the user to arrange items on a page using “frames” for text and images - it allows layering and grouping options and makes it easy to create a complex, professional looking document. A small business might use a home product like Microsoft Publisher which contains many templates and colour schemes but most soon realise that this is a poor substitute for a professionally designed document. The professional document will also allow for image manipulation, fading etc.

A print company will usually design your document for a small fee in addition to the printing costs, when you need to print a large number (for example a leaflet) it is cheaper to get it professionally litho printed than run it off of a laser printer.



Videoconferencing & Teleconferencing

Both video and teleconferencing offer distinct logistical advantages to business both large and small.

Videoconferencing

Specialist equipment is set up in each location to film and display the meeting to all participants. We are familiar with Skype & Facetime but with videoconferencing there may be large numbers of people attending the meeting.

Advantage	Disadvantage
No need to leave the office	Cost
No travel costs	Technical issues
No travel time	May need to sign documents in person
Meetings can be called with little notice	Less intimate
Can see non-verbal communication	People need training to use equipment
Can share documents on screen	Maintenance costs
Can write ideas up on flipchart	Poor internet connection
Better for environment	time zone differences
Safety	
Could be recorded	

Teleconferencing

As with videoconferencing a large number of people can attend the meeting. Usually a conference table has a hub in the middle which contains speakers and microphones to allow all participants to join in. It is possible for one person at a remote location to join in using an ordinary telephone.

Advantage	Disadvantage
Relatively cheap equipment	Technical issues
No travel costs	No non-verbal communication
No travel time	Can't see documents
Can include someone who is unable to attend and has NO access to specialist equipment	Can't brainstorm as no shared view of notes
People can come in and out of a meeting without causing a disruption	Background noise
Can call meeting at short notice	Participants can feel detached
	Poor connections

Email

Email is an increasingly important form of communication as it is widely used to communicate with all stakeholders. The general tone is less formal than a business letter but there are still elements of formality such as the use of good spelling and grammar to be considered.

The basic guidelines for email

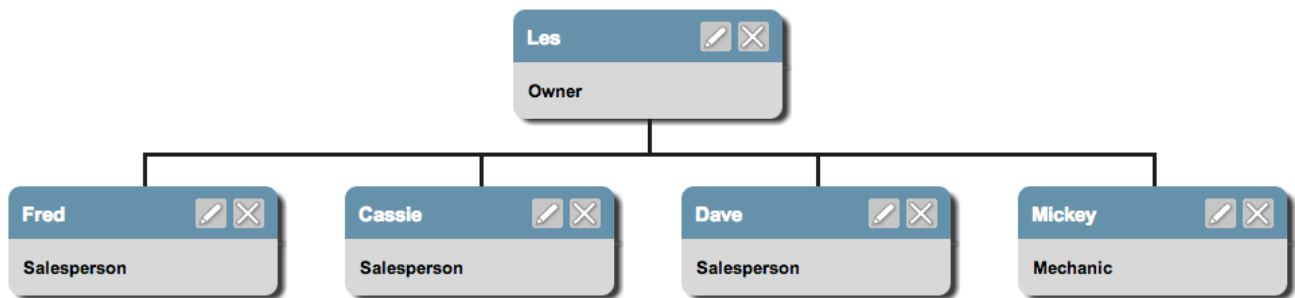
- In a small (10 or 12), plain, black font
- Use good English, sentences, paragraphs and NO text language
- Have a short subject
- Have a simple closing

Advantage	Disadvantage
Quick	No way to check receipt
Easy	Time
Cheap to send	Cost of running system
Versatile	Time-wasting
Efficient	Lack of personal communication
Appropriate	Easy to misuse
	Might not be appropriate
	Security
	Easy to misunderstand

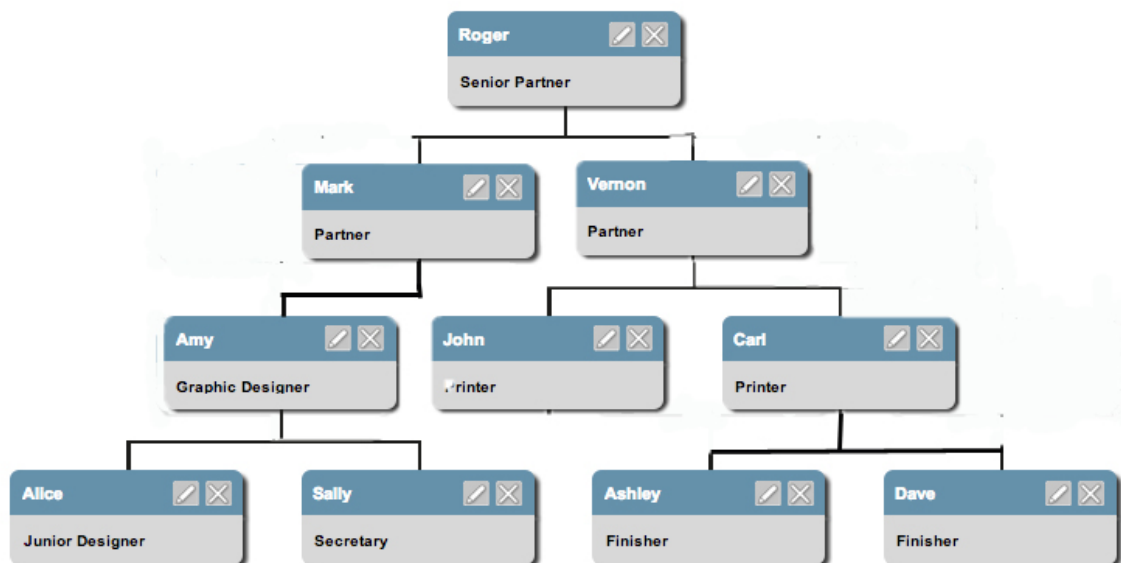
Organisation Charts

An organisation chart helps to show where all of the employees fit within an organisation. This gives a clear picture of the chain of command and hierarchy.

A flat organisation has short lines of communication and can easily adapt to change.



A tall organisation has long lines of communication and change can be a slow progress although there are more opportunities for promotion.



Often an organisation will restructure and take out management layers to save on costs, management are the higher paid staff.

Key Terms

Accessibility	making sure that anyone, even with a physical or mental disability can access the services of a business
Agenda	a list of the main items that will be discussed at a meeting
Appraisal	a meeting between an employee and their manager to review goals, progress and future targets, usually held annually
Appraisee	The employee being appraised
Appraiser	The manager doing the appraisal
Audience	Who you are communicating with
Brand	An image or identity that stakeholders recognise/associate with the company
Brand	the means by which a business creates and identity for a product which helps the customer recognise their product
Brand awareness	making customers aware of your brand and wanting to choose your brand
Broadband	A wide band connection to the internet which allows the internet to be "always on" and able to stream data quickly
Cascading Style Sheets	CSS - a language which specifies how a document is presented on the web
Celebrity endorsement	A celebrity helping to promote a brand/product to project the desired image of the product
Centralised structure	where decisions are made by head office
Chain of command	the lines of authority and responsibility in an organisation which show who is responsible for what and to whom
Conflict	A clash between people
Consistent	the same style is repeated throughout documents, reinforcing the brand image
Consultation	A process whereby one party asks for views or advice of other parties
Copyright	the legal right for the creator of an idea, image, film, artwork, music, etc to control that work's use for a period of time
Culture	The beliefs and traditions of the people of a country or region
Curriculum Vitae	a document to list the skills and qualities of an individual as well as their experience and qualifications
Customer loyalty	customers preferring one business over another
Customer profile	a description of the characteristics of buyers
Customer service	the experience that customers have in using a business
Decentralised structure	where decisions are shared throughout different departments
Desktop Publishing	Software which allows the user to create professional looking documents which incorporate a range of styles & layouts
Dividend	a share of the profits of a company received by people who own shares
Domain Name	the unique identity for a web site
E-Commerce	allowing customers to buy products or services online
Electronic	communication via any electronic means
External stakeholders	individuals and groups not directly involved with a business or its decisions but who are affected by the business
Fax	a machine that copies and sends documents through a telephone line
Feedback	what confirms to the sender that the communication has been successful
Flat structure	a structure where employees have a greater degree of equal value and authority
Formatting	a means of changing the appearance and layout of a document
Frame	an item which you use in DTP to insert images/text into
Guerrilla marketing	non-traditional methods making consumers aware of a product, chat rooms, forums, discussion boards, email, blogs etc
Hierarchy	the layers of responsibility and seniority in an organisation
Hierarchical structure	has many layers and is usually displayed in the form of a pyramid
Hosting	renting space on a server to store web pages

HTML	Hyper Text Markup Language - the programming code used to write web sites
Internal stakeholder	has a direct association and interest in the business
IP address	Internet Protocol - the address of a computer connected to the internet
ISP	Internet Service Provider - the company you uses to connect to the internet
Just-in-time	a stock control system which helps manufacturers keep control over costs by keeping stocks to a minimum
Legislation	the laws passed by national and international governments that business must adhere too
Logo	An image which stakeholders associate with a brand
Loyalty card	a means by which the buying habits of a customer can be tracked. The customer gets benefits in return.
Market reach	the number of potential customers a business is able to target
Market share	the proportion of total sales in a market by a particular business
Matrix structure	where there are many different levels of responsibility
Medium	the methods used to send the message or information
Medium	The type of communication used
Minutes	a record of the discussions at a meeting
Motivation	individuals being committed and wanting to help the business achieve its goals
Negotiation	A process where 2 or more parties have a discussion and try to arrive at an agreed course of action
Niche market	a small or specialised piece of the market where customer needs are not being met
NOMINET	the organisation that manages domain names for UK domains
Online presence	A website/strategy that allows people to see/get information about the business
Oral	a verbal method of communicaiton
Paper-Based	communication via a paper method
Presentation	the process of communicating information to an audience
Pressure groups	groups which persuade businesses and government to behaving in a certain way or take action in line with their beliefs
Product knowledge	an employee being able to give a detailed explanation of the product
Receiver/Recipient	the person or group who receive the message or information
Sender/Source	the person or group who is sending the message or information
SEO	Search Engine Optomisation - the process of making your website get to the top of the search engine listings
Server	A computer which processes or stores information which is available on the internet
shareholders	People who own shares in a business
Social enterprises	a business whose main goal is social/environmental rather than profit driven
Staff turnover	number of staff that leave in a time period
Stakeholder	an individual or group with an interest in a business
Strap line	A catch phrase which helps stakeholders to recognise and associate with the brand
Success	achieving a set goal
Teleconferencing	connecting people in different locations using telephone equipment
Template	enforces a layout, and style and ensures fonts, size colour etc are consistent
The internet	A global network of computers that are able to communicate and exchange information
The web	The part of the internet which contains linked documents which can be viewed when connected to the internet
Turnover	A measure of how much money is taken (same as sales revenue)
URL	Universal Resource Locator - the address of a web page or document
Validator	a means of checking a web page against a standard which has been laid down by the W3C
Videoconferencing	connecting people in different locations through audio video equipment
Viral marketing	the power of the internet to spread information via individuals sending the message to friends and colleagues
Visual	communication through surroundings/dress etc